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Joint Inspection Unit

Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on liaison offices in the United Nations system

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit herewith, for the consideration of the General Assembly, his comment and those of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on liaison offices in the United Nations system (JIU/REP/2007/10).[1]

* A/63/150 and Corr.1.

[1] Compiling the CEB comments on Joint Inspection Unit reports requires extensive and frequent consultation with agencies throughout the system, which sometimes delays the production and submission of the report. CEB regrets any inconvenience this may cause.

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Summary

The report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Liaison offices in the United Nations system" (JIU/REP/2007/10) examines the issues surrounding the function of those offices by United Nations system organizations.

The current report presents the views of United Nations system organizations on the recommendations provided in the JIU report. The views of the system have been consolidated on the basis of inputs provided by member organizations of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB). CEB members welcome the detailed survey contained in the report and generally accept the recommendations contained therein. They note that the liaison offices provide critical points of contact, communications and cooperation with Member States, the United Nations, its funds and programmes, specialized agencies and other international organizations and non-governmental organizations, as well as representatives to intergovernmental and inter-agency bodies.

I. Introduction

1. The Joint Inspection Unit report entitled "Liaison offices in the United Nations system" (JIU/REP/2007/10) examines the history behind those offices and how they are used by organizations of the United Nations system. The report presents a functional definition of the offices and studies their diverse scope, role, features and functions, along with their resource and management requirements. All but one of the eight recommendations contained in the report are directed at executive heads of concerned organizations and seek to strengthen the operation and effectiveness of the offices. The report concludes that most of the offices perform activities well beyond the scope of the traditional liaison function and that while some offices were not achieving their potential, on the whole liaison offices "contribute to an articulated United Nations system in the twenty-first century" and note that in "a largely unacknowledged way, they enable the United Nations system to deliver as 'one United Nations'".

II. General comments

2. CEB members welcome the report, and note that it provides an excellent review of an important subject. Organizations on the whole found the recommendations straightforward, although some expressed concerns that owing to the broad wording of some of the recommendations, their implementation would not be easily verifiable. In addition, many agencies noted that the recommendations include items that have already been applied or decided by agencies.

3. While agencies did not comment extensively on the recommendations, many provided comments intended to clarify statements within the text of the report. In paragraph 2, the JIU report gives the impression that a request of either the General Assembly or the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has not been addressed. As noted in the report, a general review had been submitted in document A/59/395. The Advisory Committee made a number of specific requests in the context of its review of individual departments or offices and, consistent with established practice, follow-up action taken by such offices has been reported in the related sections of the proposed programme budget for 2008-2009.

4. Some agencies provided clarifications regarding the functions of the offices. For example, paragraph 47 refers to the workload of the regional commissions New York office providing substantive servicing to the meetings of the executive secretaries of the regional commissions, which take place two or three times per year, as part of the core functions of the Office and therefore not extraneous to its duties and responsibilities, as may be inadvertently implied by the paragraph. Another example is in paragraph 27, which gives the impression that the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Food Programme (WFP) opened offices in Copenhagen "with the main purpose of fund-raising". For at least one of those agencies, UNDP, the main function of the office is to provide administrative support services and not fund-raising and for WFP the office in Copenhagen has no fund-raising role at all.

5. Another general comment by agencies concerned the discussion in paragraph 24 of the JIU report, which notes the role of New York as the "political capital of the United Nations". Organizations suggest that the report should also mention that

substantive discussions by agencies involved in humanitarian and development work take place regularly, aside from the political discussions described in the report. Similarly, agencies mention the emergence of the Peacebuilding Commission and its support office as an important area that helps to focus their participation in discussions that take place in New York on peace, reintegration and recovery processes.

III. Specific comments on recommendations

JIU recommendation 2: **The legislative bodies of the United Nations system organizations concerned should, based on the assessment of their liaison office(s) by the respective executive heads, recognize their strategic role and provide core funding from the organizations' regular budgets commensurate with established priorities.**

6. While organizations support this recommendation, they note that, as currently worded, it may give the impression that many agencies do not provide their liaison offices with core funding from regular budgets commensurate with established priorities. Agencies note many instances where funding is adequate, and provided from the regular and core budgets, and they point out that the recommendation could have more clearly stated that it applied only to those organizations where resources are not provided through the regular budget.

JIU recommendation 6: **The executive heads of the United Nations system organizations should, in a spirit of collaboration and reciprocity, ensure that in New York and Geneva, the learning opportunities offered to their own staff are extended to the personnel of liaison offices in these locations, and encourage the staff of their own liaison offices to make full use of available learning opportunities offered at their location by the training sections of United Nations and other agencies.**

7. Organizations strongly support this recommendation and look forward to their staff in liaison offices in New York and Geneva being able to avail themselves of learning/training opportunities offered by the training sections of the United Nations and other agencies in those locations.